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ABSTRACT

Some of the realities, at a state and national level, of implementing new teacher education standards that emphasize basic skills are discussed. Reported on is Kansas' response to the national trend toward teacher basic skill testing (five house bills concerning teacher education). The Kansas State Board of Education proposal for a competency testing requirement is described, as well as a one-year teaching internship, which would help teachers in areas that can not be tested, such as classroom management. Recent measures of the academic potential of teacher education majors are reviewed as are ways to reverse this downward trend. Preliminary research findings of elementary undergraduate majors at Kansas State University are discussed with regard to the relationship between a proposed 2.5 grade point average (GPA) requirement and students' performance on basic tests administered in reading and mathematics. It is noted that the trends report the existence of little relationship between students' competence in the basic skills and their college academic performance as measured by GPA. (JM)

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Have Skills: Will Teach?

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Have Skills: Will Teach?

New standards for admission to undergraduate teacher education in the state of Kansas, effective June 1, 1983, include a minimum grade point average, in 50 semester hours of college credit, of 2.5 on a four-point scale and the successful completion of tests in the basic skills of mathematics and communications. Current requirements may differ from college to college in Kansas, but at Kansas State University, students have been entering teacher education with a 2.2 grade point average. No tests are required, although specified courses must have been completed. Applicants must have a "C" average in two English composition courses.

The route into the teaching profession thus crosses higher hurdles of performance than have previously been required. One assumption is that a minimum level of skill or knowledge as measured on a test and/or indicated by grades achieved in college classes will assure better teaching performance. Hence, our title, "Will those who have the basic skills be better teachers?" At Kansas State University we have been conducting research basic to this question. Our purpose today is to discuss some some of the immediate realities of implementing the new standards, to put the immediate realities into a national context, and, to share with you some preliminary findings from our research.

The Immediate Realities

The primary purpose for certification of teachers is to maintain standards of competence. When the state of Kansas assumes responsibility for public elementary and secondary education, it also assumes responsibility for the quality of that education. In this regard, teacher com-

petencies in basic skills, or the lack of them, have been receiving much publicity. As of 1982, 34 states had adopted entry or exit teacher basic skills testing due to the competency movement or the discrepancies among teacher training programs. Thirteen states have implemented them (Vance and Schlechty, 1982, p. 25).

The state of Kansas has responded to this national trend by passing five house bills; however only the teacher inservice bill has been implemented. Funds have not been available to implement those bills specifically regarding teacher basic skills testing, but, it appears that Governor John Carlin plan to modify this. On January 17, 1983, Governor Carlin's second major theme besides his proposed severance tax plan, was his proposal to raise teacher salaries and, along with this, require teachers to demonstrate higher levels of competence. Governor Carlin said that in the last nine years the number of students entering schools of education has dropped 50% and that schools of education are not attracting the most capable students.

Governor Carlin's proposals recognize that in the final analysis, better qualified teachers will be attracted to and retained in the profession by higher pay. Carlin stated in order to attract better qualified teachers, the salaries would have to be raised to the national average. This state's teacher salaries are $2,702 below the national average. Finally, he said that in order to improve teacher education, a year-long intern program would augment the current student teaching requirement (January 17, 1983).

What specific role does basic skills testing play in certifying teacher competence? At first glance, it would appear that the Kansas

State Board of Education has not made specific determinations regarding the purpose for basic skills testing. In general, the board's position is that past methods of certification in Kansas have not provided sufficient criteria for determining professional competence of teachers. The board does supply three specific reasons for competency testing in general (Kansas State Board of Education, 1982):

1. All other professions such as law and medicine maintain licensing, in part, through testing.
2. The public has faith in testing -- colleges often require tests of applicants for admission, the military gives tests for classifying recruits and industry uses tests for selection and placement.
3. Findings from a public opinion poll conducted by the School of Education, Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, strongly suggested the public's preference for the testing of teachers prior to certification.

Even though the board is not entirely clear on the purpose for basic skills testing, they are very much aware that some teacher competencies cannot be certified through testing. A teacher must, for example, demonstrate adequate ability in classroom management, interpersonal skills, and subject knowledge. Not all teaching skills, however, can be assessed by testing, thus the concpet of a one-year internship was developed. The teacher would have a full year of on-the-job training and corrective advice early in the career. Thus, the board does recognize the need for alternative means to testing for teacher competence in some areas of

teacher certification.

For the area of basic skills testing, two assessment methods have been suggested (Kansas State Department of Education, November 9, 1981):

1. State developed tests which would cost in the vicinity of $780,000 to develop and would cost the individual up to $125.00 to take.
2. The National Teacher Examination, which is already being used by many states and would cost approximately $60,000 to validate and would cost the individual up to $65.00 to take.

The cost consideration was, in part, the primary reason the National Teacher Examination was selected as the test battery to be used in Kansas. Moreover, a one-year grace period (1983-1984) has been tentatively set for allowing Kansas regents' institutions to establish Kansas norms from the NTE. Beyond the testing question, cost will necessarily be a prime variable in implementing the internship and staff development programs. The estimated cost of implementing these two programs has been set at $4.5 million dollars. Pressing questions must be answered if the August, 1984 implementation date is to be met:

1. Will the state of Kansas be willing to put forth the money necessary for a full-blown teacher competency program including staff development and internship?
2. What immediate changes are needed in college and university teacher education programs?
3. What immediate impacts will be felt in local school districts? What preparations should school administrators make?

Though these questions appear quite straightforward, the complexities which underlie them will need resolution before the 1984 implementation date.

The National Context

In the national context the question is: Will more stringent collegiate academic guidelines and basic skills testing produce more competent teachers? More specifically, What specific contributions will these two criteria make to enhancing teacher performance? Certainly, definitive answers to these questions will require time and further research; however, it is important that we recognize the nationally identified need for raising standards in the teaching profession. Vance and Schlechty (1982, p. 24) stated, ". . . the teaching occupation disproportionately attracts and retains those with low academic ability and, conversely, disproportionately fails to attract or retain those with high measured academic ability."

How low an academic potential do teacher education majors have? In 1981, W. T. Weaver reported that from 1973 to 1980, the mean Scholastic Aptititude (SAT) verbal score for prospective education majors nationwide had fallen from 418 to 389, and, the mean SAT math score had fallen from 449 to 418. Weaver noted (1979, p. 30):

> Among graduating college seniors in the National Longitudinal Study (NLS) sample, class of 1976, education majors ranked fourteenth of the 16 fields (including "other" and "undecided") on SAT verbal scores. The only two groups of graduating seniors with lower SAT-V scores than teachers were those studying in office-

clerical and vocational-technical fields.

Recently, in the Chronicle of Higher Education (September 29, 1982), a glimmer of increase in SAT math and verbal scores was reported; however, this event does not reflect a definite trend of these academic aptitude scores climbing to new highs. There continues to be concern about the academic ability of prospective teachers, nationally and in the state of Kansas.

For several years we have been aware of the great number of teachers looking for jobs. Teacher shortages of the 1960's resulted in the surplus of teachers we had in the 1970's. As a result of this overload and the fact that teachers rank so low on the pay scale, more and more of the bright and talented teacher prospects have been lured into other careers which are far more lucrative. This has contributed significantly to the fact that our education majors across the nation rank lower academically as whole than most any other major area of study.

What has been done to reverse this trend? State departments of education and legislators are becoming more aware of what is happening and there is a growing involvement of state and federal legislators in the development of policies and statutes regarding teacher education. Legislators are either passing laws specifically setting regulations, establishing standards, and prescribing programs for preservice teacher education or are directing state departments of education to do so.

The proposed Kansas standards for G. P. A. and basic skills testing discussed herein ought to be viewed in the national context. As previously discussed it is not yet perfectly clear what specific purpose

the Kansas State Board of Education has for basic skills testing. This problem is nothing more than a reflection of the national concern over the extent of contribution skills testing can make to enhancing teacher competence. In Kansas, perhaps at this stage, it is nothing more than the state board's bowing to pressure from the state legislature. One confounding problem which may arise here is the fact that our professional organizations are so fragmented that legislators may receive confused, disorganized and conflicting information on which to base decisions. Whatever the case may be, we at the university level have initiated some basic research in order to determine what possible impact the new standards will have on our programs for teacher education. From these measured impacts we hope to infer changes which must be made in our programs.

Preliminary Research Findings

In a study of 287 elementary undergraduate majors at Kansas State University, we found that slightly over ten percent of those students would not have met the proposed 2.5 G.P.A. requirement. It is interesting to see how the different subgroups would be affected by this requirement. By subgroups we are speaking of the following:

1. The first subgroup consisted of those students who entered Kansas State in their freshman year with ACT scores.
2. The second subgroup consisted of students who entered Kansas State without having taken the ACT test during high school.
3. The third subgroup consisted of students who transferred to Kansas State after the freshman year.

For the total group of 287 subjects we found 10.8 percent of the

population would be dismissed if the 2.5 G.P.A. requirement was in effect. In differentiating the large group into three subgroups we found that one subgroup contributed disproportionately to the rate of dismissal, those being the regular entry students who did not take ACT test. This group also had the lowest G.P.A.'s in college English and math courses (Heerman, Trennepohl, Gleason, 1981).

There is the possibility that some students may qualify on G.P.A. requirements, but be dismissed due to inadequate basic skills test scores. Similarly, there may be others who do not qualify on the G.P.A. requirement but may possess competence in the basic skills. Other things have become apparent to us in our research:

1. The basic skills standard may dismiss from teacher education those who are weak in one or more of the basic skills. These prospective teachers may have strengths which would allow positive contribution to the field of teaching.
2. Second, the basic skills standard may allow students into teacher education programs who have mastered the basic skills, but, may have other deficiencies which would not contribute positively to the teaching profession.

At Kansas State, 106 undergraduate elementary education majors were tested in reading and mathematics. Though writing is the third skill in the basics, it was not included in the study due to time limitations during the testing sessions. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Brown, Bennett, Hanna, 1981), and the McGraw Hill Mathematics Test (Szaszy and Kline, 1970) were the instruments used. Though the data

from this study have not been completely analyzed, three initial trends are apparent:

1. Low grade point average is not a sufficient indicator of a lack of basic skills. In other words, the fact that a student had a low grade point average, did not necessarily mean that the student was weak in one or more of the basic skills.
2. Second, and closely related to the first point, is the trend that many students who had achieved a 2.5 G.P.A. or higher were often deficient in math or reading, or both. In several cases, students who had fairly high G.P.A.'s (3.0 or greater) had deficient basic skills scores.
3. Third, the algebra section of the math test was the area in which lowest percentile points were obtained.

In general, the trends report the existence of little relationship between students' competence in the basic skills and their college academic performance as measured by grade point average.

As the state of Kansas goes forward with its efforts to raise the levels of competence among its teachers we urge that all concerned move with measured caution. While it is important that the profession improve the quality of education for Kansas children, it is equally important that care be taken in setting new teacher education standards. New standards must make a measured impact and must be implemented fairly. By studying variables such as subgroup differences and relationships between GPA and skill abilities, we can gain some insights into the standards, including their impact and their equity in application.

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